



# 'CAROL' IN COLOR

## DICKENS' CLASSIC GOES ON FILM FOR TV

By Rufus Crater

... The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face. "The color hurts my eyes," she said.

CBS TELEVISION talent, technicians and help spent more than seven months in an effort to make this description of Mrs. Bob Cratchit, taken from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," impossible to apply to either the color or the dramatic value of their musical production of that Christmas-time classic.

How well they succeeded, or to what extent they fell short, will become evident Thursday night when "A Christmas Carol" is shown on the Chrysler Corp.'s *Shower of Stars* color television series (CBS-TV, Thurs., 8:30-9:30 p.m. EST).

The show was filmed in five days' time, where normal Hollywood scheduling would have taken four weeks. Basil Rathbone, who played the role of Jacob Marley's Ghost, says it presented "few production difficulties," a view shared by most of the participants, and graciously added that Dickens had written "a perfect television script" within the story itself. To see what pre-arrangements are necessary to make possible the filming of a full-hour show, in color, within the space of one work-week, B•T tracked down the evolution of "A Christmas Carol" as a color tv presentation.

It started last March. Officials of CBS-TV and of McCann-Erickson, agency for Chrysler, were turning over ideas for a Christmas program for the Dec. 23 *Shower of Stars* telecast. Someone, identity now lost, remembered that Bernard Herrmann, Academy Award-winning composer, had long been intrigued by the notion of turning Dickens' Christmas classic into an opera.

The opera idea was considered in discussions with Harry Ackerman, CBS-TV vice

president in charge of network programs, Hollywood, and was abandoned in favor of a musical version of "Carol," after which Mr. Herrmann flew to New York to discuss plans with Hubbell Robinson Jr., network programs vice president. After approval by both CBS-TV and Chrysler, the upshot was that Mr. Herrmann, whose operatic interest in "Carol" had led him to rough out an operatic plan, was commissioned to write the music, and playwright Maxwell Anderson, who had shown interest in Mr. Herrmann's idea in past years, was signed to write the libretto.

Mr. Anderson stuck closely to Dickens. He had, of course, to shorten the story for presentation as a one-hour play. It also was necessary to write songs to go with the music. In the main, however, Mr. Anderson elected to rely upon the original dialog.

Once the lyrics and the dramatic sequences were written, Mr. Herrmann went to work. Just as Mr. Rathbone credits Dickens with "a perfect television script," so does Mr. Herrmann credit him with giving, throughout the story, "one indication after another calling for happy songs, or even songs of the supernatural."

For instance, in the scene where the Spirit of Christmas Past takes old Ebenezer Scrooge to the Fezziwig ball, the need for dance music is obvious; Mr. Herrmann composed a polka of the times (*circa* 1803). For the scene between Scrooge as a young man and Belle, his girl friend, also under the chaperonage of Christmas Past, Mr. Herrmann turned out a romantic ballad. A scene that lent itself to novel music, written by Mr. Herrmann as "Spirit Song" and sung offstage by the 16-voice Roger Wagner Chorale, occurs as Scrooge, returning home late on Christmas Eve, hears ringing bells that herald the Ghost of Marley just before he materializes, if that is the word for a

translucent spirit, through the walls of Scrooge's living quarters.

In 21 days Mr. Herrmann turned out the music for the eight original songs in the production. But that, he hastens to add, does not count "the thinking time" that he had spent on Dickens over the years. In another 10 days the symphonic underscoring that accentuates the varied dramatic moods was completed.

Toughest problem of "Carol," its producers say, was that of casting. This also contributed to the decision to produce the show on film. After much shuffling, CBS-TV was able to arrange to get Fredric March, who is starred as Scrooge; Mr. Rathbone; Ray Middleton, who plays a dual role as the Spirit of Christmas Present and as Fred, jolly nephew of old Scrooge, and Bob Sweeney, the next-door neighbor of *My Favorite Husband*, who got his first serious role playing Bob Cratchit in "Carol," all together at one time for a week's shooting in October.

These are four of the principals in a cast of 66 which also includes Christopher Cook, 13-year-old British actor who plays the crippled Tiny Tim (and became so impressed in three days' wearing of a leg-brace that he has gone all out in support of the Infantile Paralysis Fund and is making tv appearance on behalf of the Christmas Seal Fund); Sally Fraser, Hollywood actress who appears both as Belle, sweetheart of Scrooge's youth, and as the Spirit of Christmas Past; Queenie Leonard, Hollywood character actress who plays Mrs. Cratchit, and Craig Hill, the young Scrooge.

Before producer-director Ralph Levy assembled cast and crew, however, much other work had to be done. One of the principal assignments, especially since this was to be a color tv show, was the costuming. This was handled by Kate Drain Law-

### MAKE-UP WIZARDRY TRANSFORMS FREDRIC MARCH INTO EBENEZER SCROOGE

